

Hope Under the Cross of Christ

† liberated like creation (vv.18-22)

† eagerly waiting with patient endurance (vv.23-25)

In the Name of Jesus Christ, our living Hope, dearly loved, mercifully redeemed children of God:

With hurricane season firing up again, wouldn't it be strange if someone chose to be in the path of death and destruction? It's one thing to say, "I'll ride it out," but not to suffer. Who chooses to suffer?

Jesus did. Christians do. It's called the **Cross of Christ** as *Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to follow me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. In fact whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. After all, what will it benefit a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what can a person give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:24–26 EHV) God's church is militant: first the cross, then the crown. Suffering is the uniform of Christ's Church on earth in a battle for souls until the last trumpet sounds. Jesus paid the price God wants for all to be saved. **Hope Under the Cross of Christ.** Is it worth it? We will be...

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This sounds like something a pastor might write, sitting comfortably in his office with a cup of coffee: *"For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us."* Did Paul know what he was talking about? Consider the crosses Paul carried for Christ which he described in detail: *"...hard work...prisons more often, been whipped far more, and I've been close to death many times. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one...beaten with rods...stoned...shipwrecked...a night and a day on the open sea...journeys, in danger from rivers...from robbers...from [Jews and] Gentiles, in danger in the city...in the wilderness...on the sea...among false brothers. I have worked hard and struggled. I've spent many sleepless nights. I've been hungry and thirsty. I've gone without food many times. I've been cold and lacked clothing...[plus] the daily pressure...of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who falls into sin without my being distressed?"* (2 Corinthians 11:21–29 EHV) All of that suffering on one side of a balance scale, tips off – always and ever outweighed by the glories of heaven.

No matter how difficult Paul's life or yours and mine, it's nothing like Christ when He cried out on the cross, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* Suffering for our sins, Jesus paid our debt in full. *"It is finished!...Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"* Forever we celebrate God's grace in Christ whose promise of heaven makes our sufferings not worth comparing with glories to be revealed.

In the beginning man chose poorly, but creation had no choice. What we call "nature," God calls "**creation**," enslaved against its will by God's curse on man's sin. Deep rooted weeds, storms and volcanos – creation also suffers because it has to serve godless people who deny the existence of the Creator. Claiming to care, they spoil the landscape of others, killing endangered species of birds and whales for electricity to charge batteries from polluting mine operations in countries that enslave children. If the sun and moon could talk, we'd hear only groaning in creation as God does. Much is caused by man like carcasses of magnificent gorillas rotting on African hillsides minus their hands. Ash trays for Europe.

Creation longs for "J-Day," Jesus-Day / Judgment Day: *"In fact, creation is waiting with eager longing – like a child on tiptoe waiting for a parade – for the sons of God to be revealed. For creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will (willfulness), but by the will of the one who subjected it, in the hope that even creation itself will be set free from slavery to corruption, in order to share in the*

glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that all of creation is groaning with birth pains right up to the present time.” God will answer creation’s cry with glorified bodies like Jesus risen from the dead – bodies free from sickness and death, not bound by time and space, glorious, healthy, youthful.

One pastor described the day that he “died” from a heart attack and then was revived. “Everything we’ve learned about the blessings of dying in faith while trusting in Jesus – it’s all true. I felt such a tremendous peace when my spirit was set free from the confines of my body.” **Liberated like creation...**

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And not only creation, but also we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we eagerly await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. Indeed, it was for this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for something we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patient endurance.

Firstfruits were the first grape cluster or sheaf of grain in offering of thanks to God for giving the harvest, then trusting God’s blessing that more would follow. Similarly our firstfruit offerings to God today – by members and the whole congregation. We receive with thanks that gives first to God, trusting more will follow. We’re grateful to already have *redemption*, but we hope for the day when we can feel it fully in our body with God in new heavens and new earth. *Patient endurance* shows in persistence.

Persistence paid off for a young man who later became a late night comic owning lots of cars. “If you really want a job, do whatever it takes to make a good impression. Years ago I lived in Boston, and when I saw a Mercedes/Rolls Royce dealer, I thought ‘I’d like to work there.’ I asked about a job, but the boss said, ‘We’re not hiring now.’ Monday morning, I...went to the car-washing bay, said ‘I’m the new guy,’ and started washing cars. After three or four days, the boss asked, ‘What’s he doing here?’ The car-wash guy goes, ‘He’s a hard worker.’ I said, ‘I figured I’d work here until you hired me.’” He did. ¹

Likewise, a teenager riding his bike seven miles to the nearest resort then home again depressed. “They’re not hiring,” he told his mom. “Tomorrow’s another day,” she said. “But, Mom!” It took several days of fourteen miles each before the boss of the sod laying crew said to this scrawny kid, “You really want to work.” “You bet I do!” “Can you lay sod?” “Watch me!” He was a lot stronger than he looked. In a few years that boss had my older brother designing water systems on golf courses. Eventually, two younger brothers had summer jobs in his landscaping company. *Patient endurance* pays.

Earthly examples of *patient endurance* illustrate how the thing most feared and loss felt the worst God turns to good for glory in the end. God has a purpose for trials through which He leads us to glory. *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God. Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope.* (Romans 5:1-5 EHV)

Remember that farmer with the old mule that fell into a worthless well? The farmer figured neither was worth saving. So, he called his neighbors to help fill the well and put the mule out of his misery. Falling dirt had the old mule hysterical at first. But finally a thought struck him. Every shovel load of dirt on his back was another chance to shake it off and step up. Blow after blow...“Shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up,” he kept telling himself. Before long the old mule, battered and dirty stepped triumphantly out of the well. Adversity meant deliverance. ²

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.” (2 Corinthians 4:17 NIV84) Glory soon...for now we **Hope Under the Cross of Christ.** Amen.

¹ Jay Leno, “Persistence Pays Off,” *Parade*, September 6, 2009, page 5.

² Author unknown. Quoted by Jeff Herring, Knight Ridder News Service. Received by M.C. 3/22/1999.